So I didn't have anything in my hands and I was joking with the Talbot Street Kid about my being unpatriotic because I hadn't bought my usual bag of comics and old books and video tapes and assorted junk. I guess we were coming out of Kip's about then, smelling of pepperoni, looking at the line of girls waiting for frozen yogurt cones, then deciding to hit the coffee house we favored on Telly for our usual decaf and hot chocolate. It was a warm sunny Saturday afternoon in Berkeley, early in May of 1986. The street was filled with people, most of them students from Cal. The Anti-Apartheid demonstrations had cooled down, though we heard a couple of guys on the corner in front of a giant t-shirt store leading a cheer, exhorting, "Apartheid must go!" I think we were heading into Leopold's basement about then to check out the latest records just then. The usual gang of teen fashion punks hung around the area, some skateboarders were making their way through the crowd. I remembered my brother making a skateboard years ago when he was about 14. he just took the wheels off an old skate and used a couple of orange crate slats. The local kids ride expensive custom made boards paid for by their dads, but some of them show a bit of restyling. I flip through the records, amazed at the number of bands that have managed to get them out. Have to laugh at some of the band names, because I know I won't be seeing them on tv or even mentioned in the daily papers, groups like the BUTTHOLE SURFERS. A bald-headed fourteen-year-old, all elbows, is going through the VIOLENT FEMMES section. Upstairs it's all pinball and video games, noisy as the bar in STAR WARS, populated by folks in spiked hairdoes and Mohawks. Mohawks were around in the fifties, but they weren't tinted pink and green with vegetable dyes. Some nerd had a checker-board haircut in my home room at Northeast High, but he didn't keep that up long. Video is bringing it all back. Kids are watching stuff like REEFER MADNESS, ROCK AROUND THE CLOCK, and THE GIRL CAN'T HELP IT, getting back into that fifties style with sport coats and leather jackets only now it's nothing but costume, then it was a real class distinction. A leather jacket meant you were a biker or a bad ass, not gay. We're back on Telegraph and a guy tries to sell me a book of poetry. Five bucks. I ignore him as usual, think about what it must be like for him to walk up to strangers and try to peddle poetry, face all that rejection over and over, like people NEED pizza and frozen yogurt and ceramic earrings and Mickey Mouse belt buckles, but who really NEEDS poetry or art or fantasy-prose? Of course, we all need them to deflate all that lowbrow tv, but who is going to admit that to some street poetry peddler? What does he know? Poets like to put on airs, manifest that holier and hipper than thou attitude, when the truth is they don't know much more than the rest of us and may be less articulate about it. I was into coffee house poetry readings back in the early sixties and some of the dreck I used to hear embarassed me. Why anyone would want to parade such a lack of wit in a public place was truly amazing. Not that all of the poetry I heard was deadly, I wouldn't want you to think that, because I heard some good, socially-conscious poetry by Ferlinghetti and Ginsberg and others, but so much of what passed for Beat poetry was so incredibly self-indulgent, you just wanted to hide your face in your expresso. Some things never change. Oh, we're into a different subject now. Standing in front of this mock German restaurant that hasn't been redecorated since the late fifties. I used to go in there once in awhile for a cheap supper, then I got violently sick one day and thought I was having a heart attack. I remember sitting down on the steps of this private clinic, thinking this was it, I would just die right there, but it was only the knockwurst. I was all right in half an hour. Never ate at the place again though, you know how that is. We cross the street in mid-block. Jaywalking is the norm around here. No one pays any attention to the street lights, but the tourists. Bikers are always riding the wrong way. One of them hit me in a crosswalk a couple of weeks ago, then just got up and rode off toward the campus; didn't even stop to see how I was. We sit down with our decaf and chocolate, watch people studying, talking, doing business, arguing, flirting, passing the time. The place we are sitting used to be Lucas', a hamburger joint. A lot of businesses have passed through it since those days and now it's an expresso house with expensive sandwiches and gourmet pastries. We used to go to coffee shops and pretend to be studying while we waited to catch an interested eye, but today I see people actually writing papers on those marble tables right there in front of God and everybody. Ah, well, who can study in the library with all those people walking around with their picket signs? Banjo music. A guy trying to milk the crowd for some money. Good luck, pal. The sidewalk is lined with tables from Bancroft down to Cody's on Haste. People get permits for those spaces and the entire area is like one big crafts fair when the weather is nice. The people who run the stores on the street probably hate it all. Why wouldn't they? The landlords are gouging them for a couple of grand a month rent, while the people on the street only have to pay for their permits. They sell everything from Indian mocassins to potted plants and rubber stamps. Certain things happen everyday. The Khrishnans dance along the street, chanting their mantras; the break dancers try to set up and do their thing, only to be moved along by the police, and the various homeless folks drift through checking out the leftovers in the garbage cans. A few people sit or stand along the street asking for spare change, and thousands of students walk to and from the campus. While I am writing this, a junky is climbing out of someone's apartment with a stereo or tv that will sell for just enough to by a bag. That tv will be sold for a small profit in some second hand store or at the flea market or at one of the hundreds of garage sales that occur in Berkeley every weekend. Someone is being held up, beat up, raped, threatened, every few minutes in this over-populated student ghetto and for every criminal caught, dozens get away. The caught ones are released very soon and they just go out and do it again. The students are the marks and the suckers, the tricks who buy sex from the hookers that work University and San Pablo. Every year the new students fall for the old tried and true hustles. The girls sit their purses on the seat beside them in the movies and someone reaches over the seat from behind and relieves them of their wallets. They sit the purses down beside them in restaurants and the same thing happens. Goodbye to Daddy's money and credit cards. Hey, I just picked up another Alger at Moe's. I'm a consumer again. I've done my part.

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My joy as an actor is to live different lives without risking the real-life consequences.

-Robert DeNiro.

(5-15-86)

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HEY SITTER - YOU DON'T EXACTLY LOOK STRAIGHT! WHERE'S YOU BEEN?
TYCHO
THE RESORT CRATER, ON YOUR MOON!
LOOKIT DEM BALLETS!
TY- WHAT?? HMMM.. YOU MAY BE NUTS BUT YOU CAN'T SELL YO' ASS, MEAN!!
BUT..! I AM MADAME X! HAVE YOU EVER BEEN TO TYCHO?
TY-CHO? TYC-HO? OH 'AH GETS IT' A TYC HO!
LEMME TELL YOU HONEY, AH'S STRICTLY TH' LOCAL HO', AN' THIS MEAN GAL'S AN OUT-OF-TOWN HO'! SO-'BYE!
HMMM.. THESE TWO BE LOCAL EASY TO CONE BY!!